

Adults Only

A genealogy of the politics of (not)Adult

Michael Coffey

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

University of Technology, Sydney

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

April 2014

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Signature of Candidate

Acknowledgement

The job of producing myself as a “Doctor of Philosophy” and the physical task of assembling and completing this thesis has been possible thanks to the input and support of many people for well over a decade.

First and foremost, I need to thank Sallie Saunders for her supervision, humour, encouragement and support throughout the construction of my honours thesis and for giving me the confidence that such an academic pathway was even possible. I was fortunate to have Clive Chappell as my supervisor throughout the difficult years of shaping my “untamed” conceptual thesis from its early factor-critical stage into something coherent and orthodox. Clive was generous with his enormous patience, discipline and clarity. He helped me to contain something that started off “very big” and abstract, into the focused and carefully streamlined text of the final thesis. In the final 24 months of my thesis, Nicky Solomon helped me to wrap it all up, fine tune its impact and make sure I kept all of the promises that I had made within the text. Nicky also brought a great enthusiasm to the proceedings that inspired me to charge over the finishing line – so to speak.

Thank you to all of my Foucault-buddies: Sallie, Clive, Nicky, Carolyn Williams, Donna Rooney and Donna Curtis who in various ways all helped me to apply Foucault to my ongoing considerations of the relations of power/knowledge, whether that be in text, in teaching or in my everyday life and work practice.

This has been a significant piece of life work and so special acknowledgement goes to Fiona and “our” sons Liam and Tom for their support, encouragement and patience and for allowing a space for me to explore, when at times we had a lot on. Also special thanks to Ivy and Pat Coffey and Francis Dell for their genes, dreams and canny mischief.

Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship/Originality	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Why (not)Adult?	3
Foucault and Lyotard versus “commonsense”	4
How this thesis is structured and what to expect	10
An overview of the content	12
Chapter Two: Methodology	15
Genealogy versus commonsense?	16
Why discourse?.....	22
Governmentality: politics and (not)Adults	23
Subjectivity, shape shifters and bodies without organs	27
Imagined histories and metanarratives	29
A reflexive note about the method ... the empirical method strikes back ... positioning the author as an “academic”	31
What ever happened to the revolution ... why does the author choose to disrupt?	34
Chapter Three: Stories of “Moral Panic”	36
The story of Morgan Featherstone ... moral panic in 2003 AD.....	39
The story of the Boy Soldiers of the Sierra Leone	44
The story of the “murder of innocence” in a shopping mall	48
An enclosure	51
Chapter Four: In Practice.....	53
Elizabeth “(not)Adults (not)@home” Circa 2008	55
Whatever happened to the revolution?	61
Field studies from Northern NSW.....	70
Youth workers versus the “system”.....	71
“Perspectives of Homeless and Unemployed Kids (PHUK)”	76
The “Youth Worker Factory” in the 1980s	80
Sex and professional boundaries	85
Misrule in the 1980s, when youth workers role play as young people	89
... the dream is over.....	95
What about all of this mess and what should we do with it?.....	99
Chapter Five: Property	100
The Code of Hammurabi	100
(not)Adults as property ... according to Aristotle and Plato	104
... other stories of (not)Adults – as the property of the father	108
Stories of (not)Adults as the property of many symbolic fathers.....	110
Governmentality ... and the battles for control, protection and regulation.....	113
(not)Adults as a burden ... the shift from an asset into a liability	117
Rethinking “protection”	118

Chapter Six: Growth	122
Ashrams, Aesop and stages of life.....	124
The contribution of Pythagoras, Aristotle and Plato	125
Philippe Aries and the “invention” of childhood as a stage of life.....	127
“Childhood” considered as a space that opens up between the world of adults and infants	130
The effect of pedagogy in affirming a distinct period of childhood as childhood in turn affirms the need for pedagogy	132
The discursive effects of the discipline of medicine on the family and (not)Adults	135
The emergence of “youth” and “adolescence” as a stage in life	136
Some key texts and ideas underpinning Hall’s version of the modern adolescent.....	140
After Hall : benchmarking (not)Adults	144
A shift towards developing “identity” and acquiring “adult skills” instead of “nurturing adults”	146
Is it possible to be a “grown up”?	149
Chapter Seven: Innocence.....	152
Forbidden fruit and the tree of knowledge.	154
St Augustine and others make some “executive decisions” about heaven and hell.	156
The cults of virginity and of the Baby Jesus	159
The protection of innocence or the prevention from premature entry into the adult world?	163
Innocence, temptation and wickedness	167
Chapter Eight: Untamed Youth	171
A reflexive note from the “untamed” academic	172
The spectre of youth out of control	173
Misrule and Carnivale	176
What do we do with our pauper children?.....	181
Untamed youth as an innate wildness and original sin.....	185
Rethinking: “out on the street”	190
Untamed youth and pop culture.....	193
Youth studies and “activism” in Australia	196
Spare the rod and spoil the child	198
Chapter Nine: Enclosure.....	202
Positioning this thesis within the existing knowledge landscape and practice.....	202
Developing discursive literacies	204
Developing and applying discursive literacies of (not)Adult subjectivity	206
“Rethinking” ... It is not just an academic concern	213
Rethinking (not)Adults – holding spaces and exclusion	214
Bibliography.....	217

List of Figures

Figure 1: “Sitting by a fence”, by Elizabeth, “More than Just Numbers Exhibition” (YAA 2008)	57
Figure 2: “Alone” by Elizabeth, “More than Just Numbers Exhibition” (YAA 2008)	58
Figure 3: “Home”, Anon, “More than Just Numbers Exhibition” (YAA, 2008)	59
Figure 4: YAA March the Streets, from “25 Years of YAA”, Coffey, October 2005	62
Figure 5: 1980s YAA Logo (YAA Archives)	68
Figure 6: Cartoon (anon.), <i>Youth Affairs Journal</i> 4(1), p. 17	72
Figure 7: “Working with young people in Coffs Harbour”, drawings by workers, October 2000	75
Figure 8: “The Perfect Youth Worker”, YAA Youth Worker Factory, October 1987 (YAA Archives).....	82
Figure 9: Rules mind map “Altered perception of coat hangers”, Workshop December 1986 (YAA Archives).....	88
Figure 10: “Resos” on parents, Austinmer, October 1986 (YAA Archives).....	91
Figure 11: “Resos” on Boredom, Austinmer, October 1986 (YAA Archives)	92
Figure 12: “Resos” on Authority, Austinmer, October 1986 (YAA Archives).....	93
Figure 13: “Resos” on The Reason For Life, Austinmer, October 1986 (YAA Archives).....	94
Figure 14: Young Homeless Person, YRAA, September, 1984, p. 24 (YAA Archives).....	97

Abstract

The problem of policing the discursive boundaries of what I describe as “(not)Adults” has been the subject of significant analysis in public policy and research since G. Stanley Hall (1904) first coined the term “adolescent” at the turn of the twentieth century. Much of the theorising of youth within youth studies and public policy on youth that have followed Hall has assumed unchallenged commonsense notions around what it is to be an authentic young person and what it is to be an authentic adult. These assumptions have contributed to the co-construction of particular, limited and often pathologised versions of young people.

However, in more recent times within the field of youth studies, following on from the work of Foucault on power/knowledge, these assumptions have begun to be challenged. This thesis takes up this challenge and contributes to this new thinking by drawing on Foucault’s governmentality, discourse and subjectivity to consider the conduct of conduct, in relation to the practices of working youth and the work of positioning young people as (not)Adults. To do this, a method of genealogy is utilised to explore the history of four discourses that contribute to the politics of the formation of (not)Adult subjectivity. These discourses are examined in relation to a range of historical texts and artefacts, philosophical texts, the narrative of the history of childhood, 19th century self help manuals and advice pamphlets for good parenting, research on adolescent development and media articles. The discourses are then examined in relation to the practical world of youth work, against texts such as minutes, training manuals, reports, photographs, workshop notes, email, written correspondence and reflections by youth workers. The purpose of this genealogical exploration is to open up the notion of “discursive literacies” and also to contribute to the ever-growing body of Foucauldian work in the field of youth work. The task is not to define what is the right way to do youth work or to be captured by the politics of exclusion, but instead it is to open up the discourses in order to consider what other ways of working (not)Adults are possible.